Virtual School Board Meeting
April 8, 2021
Virtual Public Comments by Maureen McNulty

Good afternoon, Dr. Hutchings, Chair Alderton & School Board Members.

As a nurse who works in COVID clinical research and as a parent of two teens enrolled in Minnie Howard & GWMS, I have significant concerns about the unaggressive approach ACPS is taking toward ventilation in its school buildings and the risk this poses for our unvaccinated students and staff.

To safely reopen our school buildings and reduce the risk of viral transmission, the CDC, the Harvard Chan School's Healthy Building Program, and prominent aerosol scientists are advising school officials to open classroom windows, install HEPA filters and ensure that children are eating outside. Unfortunately, ACPS does not seem to be adhering to these recommendations, as the official policy remains that classroom windows are not to be opened, and HEPA filters are only available in health clinics and "select classrooms." Additionally, we have not yet seen any formal guidance for outdoor lunch protocols from ACPS Central Office, nor have we learned of any investment in tents or outdoor eating structures. It is worth noting that our neighbors in Arlington County Public Schools have not only issued guidance on the importance of outdoor lunches, but also have installed HEPA filters in almost every classroom. Additionally, Fairfax County Public schools has spent roughly $5 million on ventilation upgrades.

Here in Alexandria City, we are being told by central office leadership that building ventilation is not perceived to be a problem and are directed to the HVAC FAQ document, which highlights the installation of MERV13 filters in select buildings and describes the routine HVAC maintenance activity that has occurred in school buildings since the pandemic started. What is missing from this document, however, are critical pieces of data, such as how many school buildings actually have MERV13 filters and how many outdoor air exchanges do occur through these filters per hour to ensure aerosol dilution. We have also been told by ACPS that HEPA filters are installed in "select classrooms" but we have no idea how these classrooms were determined to be in need of additional filtration.

Additionally, ACPS appears to be utilizing a ventilation one size fits all approach, even though Ferdinand T. Day—an almost brand-new building and GW Middle school—which is over 75 years old and had mushrooms growing in one of its science classrooms two years ago-clearly present two different ventilation risk profiles. Since ACPS has not provided air quality data in each school and given the history and realities of our aging school facilities, we can only surmise that many of our 1,300 classrooms are at risk for poor ventilation and viral transmission. What we do know is that seven of the ACPS school buildings have been given a grade of D or below by the City/ACPS Joint Facilities Task Force and that 3 of these buildings are slated to be torn down during the next five years. Additionally, we know that two of our schools will have major HVAC work and/or replacement done this summer, and that two other schools are budgeted for

major HVAC upgrades next summer. So, a reasonable person would conclude that at least seven schools are at risk for poor ventilation. But again, we are being told by ACPS to ignore this reality--and to not be concerned about ventilation in our school buildings.

With the CDC reducing distancing to 3 feet which will thereby increase building capacity and the new domination of the B.1.1.7 variant which is highly transmissible among children, we need to act now to protect the health of our students. Therefore, I implore our School Board to do the following: 1) Request data from ACPS on air quality and air exchanges in ACPS school buildings so that a transparent risk assessment strategy to improve ventilation can be implemented. 2) If that data is not available, then ACPS should be directed to hire an air quality specialist to perform a disease transmission assessment of our most at-risk school buildings; Finally, 3) Utilize federal funding to immediately purchase and install HEPA filters in our most at-risk building and purchase equipment for outdoor eating.

We can't bury our heads in the sand on this issue. The risk is too high. Let's do the right thing for our kids and community.

Thank you very much for all that you do for our students and school communities.